



Memorandum

TO: RULES AND OPEN
GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: Councilmember Sam Liccardo

SUBJECT: LENDING THE POLICE A HAND: **DATE:** January 23, 2014
CROWD-SOURCING VIDEO EVIDENCE

Approved

Sam Liccardo ^{FB}

Date

1/13/14

RECOMMENDATION:

Refer to the City Manager, and to Council through the Public Safety & Finance Committee, to evaluate whether, and how:

1. The City can create and maintain a database that will enable residents to voluntarily identify their video surveillance equipment, and location of the camera view, by use of simple on-line registration; and
2. The City could engage with private video surveillance companies to offer discounts for those homeowners and apartment property owners who seek to register new video systems with the City.

DISCUSSION:

Residents glued to their nightly new stations during the recent serial arson attacks east of Downtown will attest to the power of privately-generated video footage in lifting the veil on criminal activity. Neighbors of targeted homes captured the arson suspect pacing before and after the arsons, enabling police to corroborate sketch artist descriptions of the suspect, and to identify patterns of behavior helpful to his ultimate arrest.

With the rise of burglaries and auto thefts several years ago, many jittery residents are purchasing video security systems for their homes. In some neighborhoods, dozens of such systems proliferate.

An opportunity exists here to leverage our collective efforts to improve safety citywide. Some cities have asked residents to voluntarily register their video cameras, particularly where they yield good views of sidewalks, streets, and parks. The San Jose Downtown Association has already piloted an effort for a voluntary database of its own with Downtown business owners to register their security camera equipment with SJPd. Residents and businesses can readily do so

on-line in some cities, and little city staff time is required to maintain a simple database. This "IT" project with minimal effort that could yield a big savings of time and energy.

Many of us feel understandable discomfort with the idea of "big brother" watching our every move, but this initiative is not about government surveillance of neighborhoods. Nobody objects to the idea of police asking residents to voluntarily provide video footage where a crime has occurred nearby. This merely creates a means for residents to proactively assist police investigators in rapidly identifying the video evidence that can help crack a case, or lead to an arrest.

We can also consider how we might strike deals with security system installers to engage in group discounts of such video systems where residents choose to register their system. In this way, residents can save money, and we can all feel a little safer. My council district office led a similar "group purchase" effort with solar installations in 2008, which led to widespread adoption of solar on dozens of Downtown roofs.

The ready availability of this familiar technology can save police investigators hours of painstaking effort to find residents with video footage. Most importantly, where many of these systems will only store video records for a few days, advance knowledge of its existence ensures the preservation of often crucial video evidence.